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Michigan Department of Civil Rights calls upon the Secretary of State to live up to her word

DETROIT - Michigan Department of Civil Rights Director Linda V. Parker expressed concern today about the growing confusion among citizens and some election officials over voting requirements for the upcoming election. Parker is calling upon Secretary of State Terry Lynn Land to aggressively publicize and clarify the applicable laws and requirements.

With only five weeks before the national election – and **only four days to register** to vote - the MDCR has been receiving a steady stream of questions, concerns and complaints from residents across the state about their eligibility to vote on Nov. 4th.

Just last week Lathrup Village mailed all residents the Fall edition of the “Village Crier.” In it, the Village Clerk, Gloria Harris-Ford states in bold lettering “Photo ID will be required at the polls.” This statement is straightforward, understandable and completely wrong!

After being contacted by MDCR Harris-Ford promised to correct the misinformation. However, she is not the only clerk who passed on misinformation to the public.

Shortly before the August 2008 primary election, both the cities of Allen Park and Grand Blanc sent newsletters to city residents stating the need for photo ID without informing voters they need simply sign an affidavit if they are without such ID. The Secretary of State estimates that approximately 370,000 Michigan residents have no form of photo identification.

“If even one voter stays home on Election Day because they have been instructed they cannot vote unless they bring a photo ID, it will be a horrible deprivation of that individual’s right to participate,” Parker said. “That this misinformation might be provided by a government official is inexcusable.”

Michigan law (MCL 168.523) states in no uncertain terms that if a person at the polls does not have an acceptable ID, “the individual shall sign an affidavit to that effect before an election

inspector and be allowed to vote as otherwise provided in this act.” Or, as stated by Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land on her web site: “If you do not have photo ID or do not bring it with you to the polls, you may still vote. Simply sign an affidavit stating that you are not in possession of photo identification. Your ballot is included with all others and is counted on Election Day.”

Parker said responsibility rests with the Office of the Secretary of State. “The Secretary’s job does not end with putting correct information on the web. She is responsible for educating the local clerks and election workers on the correct law.”

“In fact, when the Department of Justice was reviewing the ID rule in another context it explicitly tied its decision to grant clearance to the photo ID change to the Secretary of State’s promise of “effective education of poll workers and voters as to the new procedures,” she said.

In addition to the confusion created by Lynn Land’s silence on the issues of photo ID, the MDCR has found that there is misinformation involving other critical issues linked to a citizens’ eligibility to vote. Among them are: whether a citizen can vote if their home is in foreclosure, whether convicted felons can vote in Michigan and whether an individual can vote if their name does not appear on the local clerk’s list of registered voters. The answer to all those questions is yes.

Given these dynamics, Parker said, “It is critical that the Secretary act quickly and in a highly visible manner to ensure the integrity of the vote in Michigan by keeping her promise to better educate the public and officials of the requirements of the law.”

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